

From Deformity to Diversity: The Evolution of Disability Narratives

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Abstract— This paper aims to explore how the idea of disability has been historically constructed, structured and concretized throughout history through myths, cultural practices and literary narratives and how in the contemporary era the notion of disability is questioned, interpreted and somewhat reinterpreted. Rather than understanding disability as merely a biological or medical condition, Disability Studies reinforces that societies actively produce meanings around bodily difference. This study takes the texts from ancient to postmodern works chronologically as its main reference. The main framework of the study is portrayed by The Disability Studies by Ed Robert and Irving Kenneth Zola along with the theory of Ideological State Apparatus by Louis Althusser and Michael Foucault's idea of biopower.



Keywords— Biopower, Disability, Evolution, Inclusivity, ISA

I. INTRODUCTION

न पृथ्वी न जलं नाग्निं वायुर्द्यौर्न वा भवान् ।

एषां साक्षिणमात्मानं चिद्रूपं विद्धि मुक्तये ॥

यदि देहं पृथक्कृत्य चिति विश्राम्य तिष्ठसि ।

अधुनैव सुखी शान्तो बन्धमुक्तो भविष्यसि ॥

("You are neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air or space. To liberate, know the witness of all these as conscious self. /If you detach yourself from the body and rest in consciousness, you will become content, peaceful and free from bondage immediately.")

-Ashtavakra Samhita Chapter 1 Verse 2 - Cultivating spiritual qualities

What is a human being, originally? Is our existence confined within the body we posit or is there something within us that remains beyond all of these? Everything in this universe that remains changing, is not true. Truth never changes. And if that is so, then neither the body nor the mind can be really true because, both keep changing from infant

to youth to old-age. The body is temporary, fragile, and destined to disappear in death - no matter whether the body is 'normal' or 'abnormal' according to society. These labels, after all, belong only to the eyes that judge, not to the essence that exists. But what remains unchanged is the consciousness - while the observed or "Kshetra" is sleeping, the observer or "Kshetrajna" always remains awake. (BG - ch 13 -13.2,13.3) Perhaps, then, to understand a human being is not to look at the body at all, but to listen to that inner stillness which has always been there, untouched, complete and eternal.

Yet, throughout ages, human societies have done precisely, the opposite - they have always been defined individuals though their bodies only. They connected someone's worth, morality and capability through their bodily appearances. It is within the "tension" ¹ - between what are told and what are made to become- that this research situated itself.

The paper begins with a simple yet intriguing question: if the self is beyond the body, why has the body been such a

powerful site of stigma? Or an object to control? From the bents of Ashtavakra himself, to the figures like Manthara and Dhritarashtra (whose bodies were the abodes of their moral cruelty); from the limping God Hephaestus to the monstrous Cyclops, or the Spartan tradition of abandoning deformed child, early narratives and social practices of different cultures were often allegorized bodily differences into a sign of cosmic curse, moral failure or social threat. They shaped the idea that to be physically different is equal to less capable, less beautiful and even less human. Over time, such ideas were carried forward into literature, where the so-called not so normal characters like Richard III² of William Shakespeare or the satirical world of *Gulliver's Travels* continued to tie the body to deeper anxieties about identity and power. Later in the Victorian age, the authors' projection of the cunning and corrupted goblins from *The Goblin Market* or the morally corrupted character of Dorian Gray from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* actually concretized those stigmas that deformity equals to corrupt nature or something that needs to be avoided. Even in the modern era also, the depiction of the character of Gregor Samsa, in *The Metamorphosis*, who turned into a vermin cockroach overnight, immediately excluded metaphorically from the society he inhabited. Even in the eyes of his parents and sister, he became a disgusting animal who should not have any place in the house.

But, in the postmodern narratives, something has begun to change. From *The Metamorphosis* to the lived experiences of Malini Chib - the body is no longer just a symbol imposed from outside. It becomes a voice from within.

This is exactly the shift that the paper seeks to trace. In order to do that it draws on the theories of Ed Roberts and Irving Kenneth Zola along with Louis Althusser and Michael Foucault. This paper argues that disability is something the society shaped through stories, institutions and ideologies that decides which body is normal and which is not.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing scholarship that contributed to this paper are, at first the classical works such as *Enforcing Normalcy* by Lennard Davis and *Extraordinary Bodies* by Rosemarie Garland-Thompson which stressed at the representations of disability in culture, art and not to mention literary narratives which challenge the societal barriers and the traditional classification of normal and abnormality. Dr. Ratan Sarkar's *Depiction of Disability in English Literature* which contributed to this paper with the understanding of representation of disability stereotypes in English literature. These representations offered important perspectives on how society views people with disabilities and alongside that, fights for inclusivity and representation in English

literature. This study also extends the existing knowledge of Dr. Rashmi Nagwanshi's work *The Representation of Disability in English Literature* where the characters with disability in selected English literary works have been studied and explored the implications of these portrayals on societal understanding and inclusion. Geethu Vijayan's *Disability Studies: A Path Breaking Approach to Literature* helped this paper to know its worth and to understand the need of the hour. In recent years the world has witnessed the drastic change in the way disabled people are treated and how disability studies promoted inclusion of disabled individuals globally. For instance, Michael Davidson's *Invalid Modernism: Disability and the Missing Body of the Aesthetic* and Clare Barker, Stuart Murray's *The Cambridge Companion: To Literature and Disability* focuses on the challenges in the way of studying disability in literature, which is narrow and not global. Last but not the least Mike Oliver's *Understanding Disability* helped this paper to understand, interpret and reinterpret disability as a social construct, not an individual's problem but a global one, shifting focus from medical impairment to social barriers.

This paper deviates from the existing literature in its approach to trace and track the evolution of the representation and understanding of disabled individuals. This paper tries to present that the idea around disability has been interpellated collectively not from a few decades or a few centuries but from ancient times. This evolution of disability narratives illustrates a gradual shift from deformity to diversity.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative, historical, and analytical approach situated within the broader paradigms of literary and cultural studies, specifically engaging with the critical discourse of Disability Studies. Moving away from rigid empirical structures, the methodological trajectory is driven by a close, contextual reading of selected literary and cinematic texts arranged chronologically. The primary textual analysis spans from ancient myths and classical narratives to postmodern works. By analyzing character depictions, from Shakespeare's Richard III and Swift's Gulliver to Kafka's Gregor Samsa and the lived experiences documented by Malini Chib, the study traces how bodily differences have been allegorized or represented across different epochs.

To decode these representations, the textual analysis is anchored by a dual theoretical framework that bridges systemic power dynamics with ideological conditioning. Utilizing Michael Foucault's concept of biopower, the study examines how the disabled body is historically regulated, marginalized, or controlled within institutional structures.

Complementing this, Louis Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses is applied to unravel how societal norms surrounding normalcy and deformity are culturally reproduced and deeply ingrained in public consciousness through stories and media. The foundational perspectives of Ed Roberts and Irving Kenneth Zola further guide this lens, ensuring that disability is evaluated not merely as a biological reality, but as a meaning actively produced by society. Through this combined theoretical lens, the research investigates the narrative transition from early depictions of disability as a moral failure or metaphor to contemporary narratives that demand authentic representation and systemic critique, effectively tracking the evolution from deformity to diversity.

IV. DEFORMITY AS PUNISHMENT - ANCIENT TO RENAISSANCE PERIOD

Building on the methodological framework established, the textual analysis of this paper begins from the earliest depictions of Sage Ashtavakra, probably the first ever conceptualization of disability in the ancient era. In that period, physical appearance has been linked to allegorical meanings, for instance, if a person doesn't have a perfect physique or if they are suffering from some kind of disability or impairment, it was to be believed that they are having cosmic curse or some kind of punishment due their bad past karmas although as presented in Ashtavakra Gita where, the conversation between Raja Janak and Ashtavakra Muni reveals that the true self is distinct from the temporary fragile gross³ body. Foremost, this paper discusses Sage Ashtavakra whose body presents a paradox within ancient Indian thought. According to traditional accounts, while still in his mother's womb, Ashtavakra corrected his father Kahola as his father mistook reciting Vedas. As a result, his father cursed him out of anger that he will be born with eight bends. Even his name laid upon his physical deformity. But why did his father give this particular curse? He could have given another one. It is deeply symbolic and culturally meaningful. This is a form of punishment which will stay permanently and can be seen and discriminated against by society. That's how deformity becomes a socially legible punishment. A son correcting his father, even though the son is right, was considered as 'adharma' as it was a form of violation of hierarchy. Despite all these, Ashtavakra achieved the highest spiritual dimension, understanding and teaching the society, the true self is beyond the body. That is how he first suffers by the stereotypes but later transcends it. From Althusser's perspective, the narrative reveals how ideology naturalizes bodily hierarchy and the then dominant cultural institutions (the sages were considered the supreme Gurus at that time) actually produced the categories of 'normal' and 'abnormal'

as if they were self-evident truths. From a psychoanalytical point of view, his body marks as a reservoir where the ego, that is often related to the visible, is shattered so that a deeper self, closer to Jung's notion of "Self", may emerge. His conversation with King Janaka symbolizes the process of individuation in which the conscious and the unconscious mind fuse into a unified whole.

In epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, disability is frequently aligned with moral ambiguity or ethical failure. The character of Manthara, the hunchbacked maid of Rani Kaikeyi in *Ramayana* is portrayed as manipulative and malicious. She remained the main 'daasi' of the queen since childhood. She brainwashed the mind of Kaikeyi to force the king to send Rama, the elder son of king Dasharath and the future king of Ayodhya, in vanavas through the power from a previous promise by the king that he will fulfil any wishes of the queen. The main motive of her was to designate Bharat, the son of Kaikeyi, as the next king of Ayodhya. When the character is read through the triangulated lens of Jungian psychoanalysis, Althusser's ISA and disability studies, the character is not only cunning but a reservoir where psyche, power and embodiment mingle together. She is a projection of "shadow archetype"⁴, representing the repressed anxieties and the dark side of human being which sometime overpowers the public self. In the case of Manthara, maybe it is the result of the continuous fear of losing power, as she was the main servant of Kaikeyi, if instead of Bharat, Rama gets the throne, Kaikeyi will not be so influential and as a result Manthara will lose the minimum security she has. The text does not show she has any kind of hatred towards Rama. but still she manipulated Kaikeyi out of her fear of losing the identity of her and her beloved queen. In this case she cannot be labelled as an antagonist fully; in fact, she herself is a victim of discrimination. In Althusserian terms, Manthara acts as a micro agent of the Ideological State Apparatus, not through any institutional authority but an internal commanding household voice that has emerged by constant ideological interpellation which has been injected in 'manthar gati' (literal meaning of 'Manthara') or a slow manner. Her crookedness is read as both corporeal and ethical that reveals how the text encodes ideological bias onto the disabled body, making an instance how the social stigmas have been created and justified.

Another example of such a shadow archetype is the character of Dhritarashtra in the *Mahabharata* as his inborn blindness operates simultaneously at the levels of power and social construction. His blindness, through the discriminations he faced from childhood, becomes internalized as a lack, which eventually creates hatred for his own brother Pandu who, according to him, was the king just because he was physically normal. This internalization

made him commence grave adharmas throughout his life. Even after being the working king or 'karyakari raja' throughout many years, he did not want to leave the throne to the actual successor which is Yudhishthira; and in order to make Duryodhana (eldest son of Dhritarashtra) the king of Hastinapur forcefully, he did numerous wrong acts including the worst one that is the disrobing of Draupadi who was the 'Samragyi', 'Kuru Kula Vadhu' and the wife of the five Pandavas. He internalized his blindness so concretely that even when Rishi Vyasa and Shree Krishna both offered him cosmic vision or 'Divya Drishti' twice, he rejected both the offers as he could not 'see' the result of his own injustices. Yet, unlike Manthara he was not disabled but impaired and a crucial character who was the working King himself meaning he was situated at the center of power, passively reproducing and legitimizing it where his blindness became a tool of a public mask and from within his shadow self was dominating.

The reference of Kubja, who has a three-bent body, from *Mahabharata* is another example of deformity. Unlike Dhritarashtra or Manthara, she was not portrayed as evil; rather she silently suffered through her entire life until Krishna came to Mathura and by the touch of him, she transformed into a beautiful maiden. This shows that no one except God can cure deformity and deformed humans have to wait for God regardless of how much time it takes. But who determines what body is perfect and what not? From Althusserian point of view, Kubja's transformation into a "straight" and beautiful body reveals the deep operation of ideological conditioning, where the only imaginable redemption for a disabled body is its normalization, thus reproducing dominant aesthetic and bodily norms through a divine apparatus rather than dismantling them.

This bodily discrimination is not confined only within Indian mythology but worldwide. For instance, the Spartan tradition of abandoning deformed children.

In Greek mythic consciousness, figures such as the Cyclops and Hephaestus, alongside the Spartan infanticide of abandoning deformed infants, together reveal a tightly interwoven ideological structure that can be sharply illuminated through Jungian psychoanalysis, Louis Althusser's concept of ISA, and Disability Studies. From a Jungian perspective, the Cyclops operates as an embodiment of the collective unconscious's repressed "shadow," where bodily abnormality is projected as monstrosity, encoding society's fear of deviation into a singular, grotesque eye that symbolizes both excess perception and primitive lack, while Hephaestus represents a more conflicted archetype—the wounded creator—whose impaired body is simultaneously marginalized and instrumentalized, revealing an unconscious attempt to reconcile deficiency with productivity without ever

normalizing it. This psychic structuring seamlessly aligns with Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses, where myth functions as a cultural ISA that interpellated subjects into accepting a normative bodily order: the Cyclops is expelled as the absolute other, Hephaestus is conditionally accepted only through utility, and Spartan infanticide emerges as the most material enforcement of this ideology, where the state directly inscribes normativity onto the population by eliminating bodies that disrupt the ideal. Disability Studies exposes this entire formation as neither natural nor inevitable but as a historically produced regime of meaning, where bodily difference is systematically transformed into a site of fear, control, or conditional value; thus, what appears as myth or tradition is in fact a coordinated epistemic violence that constructs disability as deviance, legitimizes its exclusion, and normalizes the erasure of non-conforming bodies under the guise of cosmic order, divine hierarchy, or civic necessity.

The study further incorporates the instances of deformity in the Renaissance period. It takes the example of the famous play by Shakespeare. In *Richard III*, the main character King Richard III reveals a fractured Jungian psyche where failed individuation produces a hyper-conscious self that converts exclusion into calculated performance. He was never an inborn villain, rather he was self-aware. He openly stated that, "I am determined to prove a villain" and then stages himself differently for different audiences—pious before the citizens, submissive before Lady Anne, loyal before the court. That's how he is also another example of the Jungian Shadow archetype. Through Louis Althusser's lens, he is a subject constituted by ideology that codes bodily deformity as moral deviance, which he both exposes and exploits. His villainy thus emerges not as innate evil but as a strategic negotiation between psychic rupture and ideological conditioning.

V. DEFORMITY AS CONCRETIZED SOCIAL TABOO - NEO CLASSICAL TO VICTORIAN ERA

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* construct an example of bodily difference, where each society Gulliver enters not only reacts to his body but builds different meanings through their social customs. When Gulliver first woke up on the island of the Lilliput, he saw lots of tiny cords by which he was bound. It is an ideology where they want to control the non-normative body, they measure his body, climb on it and want to know about his body and make a list of the things he carries in his pocket which is also new to them. When seen through the lens of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus, the body which does not fit in the established norms, people try to control it in different

ways through imposing conditions upon them. The emperor gave Gulliver freedom after he agreed upon loyalty and obedience. After looking at Gulliver's body the reaction of Lilliputians reflects on the politics of 'power', precisely, Foucault's concept of biopower - where the body is controlled and observed by the authority of the society. The Lilliputians' acts of chaining, measuring, counting his belongings and consulting with others on what to do with him. The emperor always keeps a safe distance from Gulliver and observes him how he reacts, does things and instructs others because he is the political authority that controls not only an individual but also society itself. Disability Studies make the argument stronger. Gulliver is not disabled; he became one when he entered into a different society. He is labelled as a giantlike figure and when he went to the society of Brobdingnag, he became so small and the farmer made him an economical entertainer and displayed to the audience what his non-normative body looks like in exchange of some fortune. But Ed Roberts and Irving Zola state that the concept of disability is not just a medical problem but what society makes them by giving them lack of opportunities and also through ideology that makes the disabled person an evil one. Next, the paper brings the example of Struldbrugs who are immortal but aging. Swift portrays them as disgusted people, pity them, as well as mock them about what exactly society looks towards the disabled people. The concept of the dependent body is not only applicable for the disabled people but also to the aged people.

"Come buy, come buy" Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* opens with this seductive cry of goblins which seduce the female body to break the rule and do something transgressive and gradually the poem instructs how this transgression turns into punishment. Lizzie's statement "We must not look at goblin men" not only symbolizes temptation of the goblin about their grotesque body and nature but also this is the ideological sign of breaking the Victorian societal norms prescribed for women. Rossetti describes goblins with features like cat faces, rat tails, snail paced movement with large ears, a monster-like figure which shows bodily deformity on one hand and on the other the moral corruption. They do not possess the 'normal' body and are presented as untrustworthy and dangerous for society. From the perspective of Disability Studies, constructed by Ed Roberts and Irving Kenneth Zola, presents how literature shapes society's mind about everything and teaches how to connect a disabled body with evil spirit rather than just describe it as the other form of the human body. After eating the goblins' seductive fruit Laura deteriorates physically. Her hair turns gray, she cannot hear the sounds of goblins anymore and decay day by day, this is not a biological coincidence for her, it is a moral and

physical as well as psychological punishment for her. It is a punishment in the eyes of Victorian society as she tried to break the rules imposed upon women at that time but ideologically women shouldn't need to question boundaries imposed upon them. Here Althusser's idea of Ideological State Apparatuses comes and represents how the poem impacts the ideology of the audience about the Victorian morality of female obedience and confinement. Through the lenses of Biopower by Michael Foucault where he simply said that power is not only to castigate people but they control or manage the people's body and make sure that all people act 'normal' as society expects. When Laura eats the forbidden fruits of goblin and acts abnormal in the terms of society, Lizzie goes, faces the goblins and brings the juice to restore Laura in her normal position – her power acts as a healing process. A comparison of – the serpent in the Garden of Eden tempting Adam and Eve for consuming the forbidden fruit of knowledge, in the poem goblin tempts Laura in all the ways for their exotic fruits – in both examples fruit is the main medium of temptation. According to the Archetypal Criticism from the works of Carl Jung & Northrop Frye, some characters and symbols repeated across human culture through universal history are called Archetypes. In this poem, Goblin or the Serpent act as a universal archetype. Their disabled body has survived beyond the norms which signify the moral decline which paved the way for destruction.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a novel about a man named Dorian Gray who trades his soul to the evil for eternal youth while a painted portrait ages in accordance with his moral corruption - shows how the natural phenomenon of aging is connected with moral vanity. The portrait here stands for a metaphorically disabled body. The society not only controls through law but through culture, religion and education, which, according to Althusser, is an Ideological State Apparatus and teaches them about their morality, beauty and body. These institutions teach people what is good, what is not good, what is appreciated, what is not appreciated and most importantly what is normal and what is not normal about the body. Victorian society always wants people to be beautiful, presentable and physically refined, for them beauty is a sign of moral goodness. If there is anyone who is not beautiful or normal according to them, they must be abandoned from society. The main character has grown up with the same perspective. Lord Henry Wotton constantly told him about the youth & beauty one should possess for their whole life. He does not force Dorian about this idea but he slowly injects it in a way people absorb the ideology then he curses his own picture. In this regard, the concept of "Disciplined body" by Foucault can be relatable where society teaches individuals how to behave with obedience without even realizing it. Gray

thinks that like the guard of the Panopticon⁵, someone always keeps an eye on him. Ed Roberts and Irving Kenneth Zola argued that disability is not a medical and biological condition rather it is a social phenomenon that constructed the word 'disabled' and rejected those who are actually suffering from this. Society should provide them more opportunities so they can grow in different ways. Similar to the story, where society states that the picture must be hidden in some corner because Victorian society is not ready to face their own flaws like ugly faces, moral declination and bodily decay but they try to hide their mistakes through their beauty. Here again the archetype of a crooked body linked with an evil soul is repeated and marked by the 'shadow archetype'. In order to protect the 'persona' or a perfect public self, which was a most important factor in the Victorian era, his moral corruptions are projected into the portrait itself. Here the portrait functions as a horcrux of Gray. As soon as he stabs the picture, the real Gray dies and the distortion that was previously seen in the picture, immediately imposes upon the face of Gray and the portrait becomes youthful as it was. Here Gray's inner cruelty and repressed desires are presented by the distorted picture. This separation reinforces the cultural idea that deformity becomes the visible mark of inner evil, aligning with the paper's argument that bodily distortion is historically used to symbolize moral degeneration.

VI. DEFORMITY - PHYSICAL CONSTRAINT OR MENTAL CHAIN? STEPPING TOWARDS SUBVERSION- MODERN TO POST MODERN ERA

Moving on to modern literature the representation or rather the stripping of human status due to the physical inability is widely captured in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Louis Althusser's lens of Ideological state apparatus, when used to read the text, reveals how identity is constructed and shaped by capitalist production. The economics apparatus comes into play when the chief clerk visits Gregor Samsa as soon as he is late for work. This invasion of the private sphere suggests the loss of identity soon after losing the production ability. Gregor's loss of "normal" communication ability instantly raises the question if he is a normal functioning human or not. Once the ability to earn is lost the family apparatus completes the ideological erasure, which is physically manifested when Grete and the mother removed most of the furniture belonged to the human Gregor to give him "room to crawl", and act that reshapes the environment to enforce a non-human individual. Gregor's desperate attempt to save the picture on the wall symbolizes a last, futile resort against this erasure of his human status. Lastly, the father's apple attack, that

gets the apple lodged deep into his back, leaves Gregor permanently tainted. This symbolizes society's physical, emotional and violent rejection of the disabled body. This destruction of Gregor's identity gets the last knell on his coffin, when his sister states "We must try to get rid of it...If he could understand us, then it would be possible to come to some agreement". The family entirely rejects Gregor the human by referring to him as "it". This family apparatus actively erases the individual who no longer fits into the institutional norms of basic communication, economic utility and inability to produce.

If Kafka illustrates the vastness and force of normative ISAs, Malini Chib's autobiography *One Little Finger* focuses on standing against all of them. Chib's memoir documents a constant battle against society from the birthing bed. Her medical condition called cerebral palsy has got her into struggles for acceptance in any Indian educational institutions, constructing with this experience her later interactions in the UK, exposes the educational Ideological State Apparatuses as an obstacle that forcefully rejects entry to those who are "not fit" or "non-functionable" for a capitalist society. This permutate of education in Malini Chib's life has been presented as a protest against a society that hastily generalizes a disabled person, a passive patient. Overall, she criticizes the medical gaze, established through constant encounters and interactions with doctors and therapists, which views disability just through a pathological lens and reduces her to a "broken machine" that needs fixing, threatening to destroy her individual identity. However, Malini Chib reclaims her identity overtly by the symbolic title of the book *One Little Finger*, which is everything she uses to type and tell her story to the readers. By using technology to get past her physical limitations, she firmly revokes the erasure of her identity. Here she symbolically states that the world will reshape itself to accommodate not only her but also any individual with limitations, rather than allowing the world to reshape one's own identity to fit its "rigid normativity".

Whether it is Kafka's allegorical tragedy or Chib's lived experiences that resist established norms, the theoretical underpinning of them or found in Michael Oliver's *Understanding Disability*. Oliver presents a critical eye towards the Apparatuses that disable individuals, changing the focal point from individual impairment to institutional and social barriers. He argues that different professionals such as social workers, medical staff or institutional administrators are often ideologically devoted to reinforce power and control over individuals with impairments. Here Oliver reconstructs the lens of the society where disability is showcased as a deficit requiring management, the welfare committees and medical service providers promote structural dependency. They interpellated impaired

individuals as passive receptors of care rather than active and autonomous citizens. Michel Oliver through this theoretical lens perfectly brews and enhances the previous mentioned literally examples and exposes the institutional rigidity that forced Gregor Samsa into a dependent helpless “non-human” status within his own room and it exhibits the very hierarchical power structure that Malini Chib consistently combats to achieve and independent, “self-written” life.

VII. CONCLUSION

The trajectory traced throughout this paper—from the bent body of Ashtavakra to the voice-claiming subjects of contemporary narratives—reveals not merely a shift in representation, but a profound transformation in the very epistemology of disability. What begins as a culturally inscribed mark of curse, punishment, or moral deviation gradually unfolds into a site of resistance, selfhood, and plurality. Across myth, epic, classical literature, and modern texts, the disabled body has been persistently read, interpreted, and controlled by dominant ideological structures that sought to stabilize the fragile boundary between the “normal” and the “abnormal.” Through the frameworks of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, it becomes evident that these boundaries were never natural but systematically produced—through narratives, institutions, and cultural conditioning that normalized exclusion while masking it as truth. Yet, as the analysis demonstrates, this imposed meaning is neither fixed nor inevitable. The figure of Ashtavakra already disrupts this paradigm at its origin, offering a philosophical counterpoint that refuses to reduce the self to bodily form. His teaching—that the essence of being lies beyond the mutable body—quietly destabilizes the very logic upon which stigma is constructed. However, for centuries, literature continued to reinscribe the body as a visible index of inner corruption or lack, from Manthara and Dhritarashtra to Richard III and Gregor Samsa. These figures expose how deeply ideology penetrates the psyche, transforming social prejudice into internalized identity.

The modern and postmodern turn, however, marks a decisive rupture. Disability begins to speak rather than be spoken for. It is no longer confined to metaphor or allegory but emerges as lived reality, demanding recognition beyond pity, fear, or correction. Narratives foreground embodied experience, not as deviation from a norm, but as an equally valid mode of existence. In doing so, they challenge the long-standing assumption that normalization is the only path to acceptance, instead proposing diversity as the fundamental condition of human life.

Thus, the movement from deformity to diversity is not

simply historical—it is philosophical and political. It calls for a reimagining of the human itself, no longer anchored in bodily perfection or conformity, but in the multiplicity of forms through which life manifests. In returning to Ashtavakra at the end, the paper completes a conceptual circle: what was once articulated as a spiritual truth now resonates as a socio-cultural imperative. If the self is indeed beyond the body, then the hierarchies imposed upon bodies lose their ultimate legitimacy. What remains, then, is not the correction of difference, but its acknowledgment—an ethical recognition that everybody, in its uniqueness, already participates in wholeness.

VIII. NOTES

[¹ Tension - Tension in Poetry (1938) by Allen Tate defining tension as the crucial balance between a poem's literal(denotative) and metaphorical(connotative) meanings, representing the total meaning of a poem]

[²Richard III - King Richard III (1452–1485) was the last Plantagenet and English king to die in battle, killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field, ending the Wars of the Roses. Ruling from 1483 to 1485, he seized the throne from his nephew, Edward V. His remains, discovered under a Leicester car park in 2012, showed scoliosis and severe battle injuries.]

[³Three types of body – Gross (tangible), Subtle (Jivatma) and causal (cause of birth)]

[⁴Shadow archetype - the unconscious, depressed, dark side of human being, elaborated by Carl Jung]

[⁵Panopticon - A panopticon is a circular prison design featuring a central surveillance tower surrounded by cells, allowing a single guard to observe all inmates without being seen. Conceived by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century, it is a metaphor for total surveillance and self-regulation]

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